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Illinois
Environmental
Protection Agency

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Cleaning the Air



Vehicle Emission Testing In Illinois

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Is the Emission Control System On My Motor Vehicle Working Properly?

The Illinois vehicle emission test checks whether or not the emission control system on your motor vehicle is working properly. Motor vehicle manufacturers are required to meet increasingly stringent pollution standards, but vehicles that are not properly maintained or that have malfunctioning emission control systems often exceed these standards. Vehicle emission tests identify such vehicles, and repairs are then required to reduce the emissions which cause pollution. These repairs help clean the air while improving the vehicle's performance and fuel economy.

When is My Car Scheduled to be Tested? How is It Tested?

Your vehicle is scheduled for testing every two years: even model year vehicles are tested in even years, and odd model year vehicles are tested in odd years. A tailpipe exhaust sample is taken at low idle (engine speed between 350 rpm and 1300 rpm) and analyzed for concentrations of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide. The "black bag" that the lane operator may use on your hood is one of three different electronic sensors used to determine engine speed.

What if My Car Fails the Test?

Vehicles failing the emission test must be repaired, then retested. If your vehicle failed the emission test, we recommend that you have the vehicle repaired by a qualified technician who is experienced in the diagnosis and repair of emission control systems. If a vehicle cannot pass the emission test, a waiver may be available after the emission control system has been inspected and the required repairs and adjustments have been completed. All emission control components must be present and functioning, but major engine overhaul is not required.

Frequently Asked Questions

TEST NOTICE

Q. When can I come in for an emission test?

A. We urge you to have your vehicle tested as soon as possible after receiving the test notice. A vehicle can also be tested up to a month early, if necessary.

Q. Can I get my car tested even if I forgot my test notice?

A. Yes, under normal circumstances. However, we recommend that you bring your test notice with you to the test station to allow for the most efficient processing of your vehicle.

Q. What if I received a test notice in error?

A. Please read, then complete and mail the post-card contained in the test notice.

Q. What should I do if my address is incorrect on the test notice?

A. State law requires that you notify the Secretary of State within 10 days of any change of address. As a convenience, change of address forms are usually available at test stations.

Q. Do I have to keep the test notice after my car has been tested?

A. You may discard your test notice after your vehicle has passed the emission test or received a waiver for this test cycle.

Q. After my vehicle has been tested, do I need to mail anything to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency or the Secretary of State?

A. No, since test results are automatically recorded and transmitted. If your drivers license and/or license plates have been suspended for failure to comply with the vehicle emissions test, it will take approximately 72 hours for the suspension to clear after you pass the test or receive a waiver.

Verification that the suspension has been terminated can be obtained by calling the Secretary of State's office at (800) 252-8980. Please have your drivers license number and vehicle identification number (VIN) ready when you call.

“While my vehicle was being tested ...”

TEST PROCEDURES

Q. What is the Air Team testing for?

A. Cars are tested for the pollutants called hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide. Hydrocarbons are unburned gasoline particles that contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone, often referred to as smog. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless and toxic gas formed from partially burned fuel that can adversely affect mental function, visual acuity, and alertness.

Q. Why do all of the accessories need to be turned off?

A. Electrical accessories can interfere with the electronic sensing of engine speed and can adversely affect the test results.

“My vehicle just failed ...”

TEST RESULTS

Q. What should I do if my car fails the emission test?

A. First, see the state inspector, located at each test station, for an explanation of your test results. The state inspector will also be able to provide you information on what repairs typically are necessary to remedy the problems your vehicle may have.

Q. How should I choose a repair shop?

A. We recommend that you seek a technician who is trained and experienced in emission system diagnosis and repair. Many technicians are certified by the vehicle manufacturer, and the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). Seek a shop with a four-gas emissions analyzer that is regularly calibrated. The shop should be willing to guarantee work and have a refund policy.

What is Ozone?

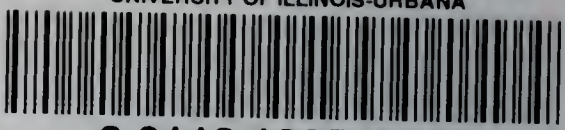
Gasoline powered engines produce emissions that form ground-level ozone (smog), a respiratory irritant that can be harmful to humans. Ozone can cause eye and throat irritations and can damage breathing passages, making it difficult for the lungs to work. This pollutant is prevalent in major metropolitan regions, including Chicago and East St. Louis.

As Illinois struggled during the late 1970s and the early 1980s to come to terms with ozone problems, it became evident that federal and state ozone health requirements could not be attained without implementing some type of vehicle emission testing program. In 1983, U.S. EPA began formal sanctions to withhold federal highway funding from Illinois for failure to institute such a program. In response to these sanctions, the Air Team was initiated.

Since the program started in 1986, vehicles have become less polluting, but still contribute as much as 50 percent of the emissions that form ozone in urban areas. As more vehicles are now equipped with an array of computer-controlled components that reduce pollution, enhancements to vehicle emission tests will be necessary to effectively identify excessive emissions.

NEAR THE GROUND, OZONE IS FORMED IN A THREE-STEP PROCESS:

- 1** Gasoline, paints and solvents evaporate, releasing reactive organic compounds.
- 2** Cars and factories burn fossil fuels, releasing nitrogen oxide gases.
- 3** Heat and sunlight trigger a chemical reaction between these emissions, transforming them into ozone.



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"I was just wondering ..."

MISCELLANEOUS

Q. What happens if I do not comply with the vehicle emission test?

A. Your driver's license and/or license plates will be suspended.

Q. Why aren't diesels tested?

A. Diesel exhaust contains relatively low levels of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide, which are the pollutants tested for in Illinois.

Q. How much will it cost to have my vehicle tested?

A. The state of Illinois does not require the general public to pay a fee for an emission test or the issuance of a waiver.

Q. Why doesn't everyone have to test their vehicles?

A. Based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency air quality standards, only the Chicago and East St. Louis areas of the state have severe ozone problems that necessitate emission testing.

Q. Why do some lanes move faster than others?

A. The same test procedures are used for all vehicles. The vehicles being presented for testing are the variable factor in the process. Fluid leaks, exhaust system problems, idling problems, and insufficient warming (preconditioning) of the engine can create problems with vehicle testing, and therefore cause lanes to move at different speeds. Recent vehicle registrations or changes, failure to provide necessary repair data or exceeding test limits can also cause delays. It is our goal to make the emission test as fast and convenient as possible.

If you have any other questions, please visit the state inspector at any of the 22 Air Team test stations or call the emission test hotline at 847-758-3400.